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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION NATO
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER
AMCONSUL OPORTO
AMCONSUL PONTA DELGADA

C O N F I D E N T I A L LISBON 2136

ROME FOR ILLING

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PO
SUBJ: CATHOLIC BISHOPS ON ELECTIONS

REFS: (A) LISBON 2067; (B) LISBON 2070

SUMMARY: PORTUGUESE BISHOPS HAVE CALED ON CATHOLIC ELECTORATE TO VOTE. BISHOPS EXCLUDED BOTH ABSTENTION AND UNMARKED BALLOTS AS ACCEPTABLE OPTIONS FOR CHRISTIAN VOTERS. BISHOPS ALSO CALLED ON ELECTORATE TO STUDY PARTY ALTERNATIVES, KEEPING IN MIND CHURCH'S TEACHING REGARDING WHAT KINDS OF ALTERNATIVES ARE ACCEPTABLE ONES. END SUMMARY.
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1. PORTUGUESE EPISCOPAL HIERARCHY'S CONFERENCE IN FATIMA (REF A) HAS ENDED WITH ISSUANCE OF COMMUNIQUE DIRECTED "SPECIFICALLY TO THE CATHOLIC ELECTORATE OF THE COUNTRY." NOTING THAT APRIL 25 ELECTIONS HAVE LOST SOME SIGNIFICANCE, BISHOPS NEVERTHELESS CHARACTERIZED THEM AS "EXTREMELY IMPORTANT" FOR PEOPLE TO SHOW WHAT KIND OF SOCIETY THEY WISH TO BUILD IN PORTUGAL.

2. CHOICE INVOLVES MORE THAN JUST "FUNDAMENTAL CIVIC RIGHT." IT IS ALSO A "GRAVE OBLIGATION OF THE CONSCIENCE." BISHOPS THEREFORE COUNSELED THAT "NO ONE SHOULD ABSTAIN," THAT ALL SHOULD STUDY PARTY ALTERNATIVES, AND THAT CASTING UNMARKED BALLOTS IS NOT AN ACCEPTABLY CONSCIENTIOUS ACT.

3. INSOFAR AS STUDY OF ALTERNATIVES IS CONCERNED, BISHOPS MADE CLEAR THAT THEY DID NOT HAVE IN MIND "EXHAUSTIVE ANALYSIS OF PROGRAMS." WHAT COUNTS IS GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT SEVERAL PARTIES REPRESENT AND PROPOSE. VOTERS ARE FREE TO CHOOSE FROM AMONG PARTIES THAT ARE SINCERE, COMPETENT, AND WHOSE VALUES ARE IN KEEPING WITH THOSE OF PORTUGUESE PEOPLE; THEY SHOULD REJECT PARTIES PROMOTING HATE AND VIOLENCE, OR ADVENTURISTIC UTOPIAS. CATHOLICS ARE SPECIFICALLY ENJOINED FROM VOTING FOR PARTIES WHOSE "IDEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES, PRO-FESSED OBJECTIVES AND PROCESSES, OR HISTORIC ACCOMPLISHMENT DEMONSTRATE A TENDENCEY TOWARD GOALS INCOMPATIBLE WITH A CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF MAN AND HIS LIFE IN SOCIETY."

4. BISHOPS CONCLUDED THEIR STATEMENT ON ELECTIONS BY RECALLING THEIR PASTORAL LETTER OF JULY 16, 1974, IN WHICH DISCUSSION OF ACCEPTABLE AND UNACCEPTABLE ALTERNATIVES WAS ELABORATED AT GREATER LENGTH.

5. COMMENT: BISHOPS' ELECTION STAND IS CLEAR SIGNAL FOR PARISH PRIESTS THROUGHOUT PORTUGAL (BUT PARTICULARLY IN MORE POPULOUS AND RELIGIOUSLY OBSERVANT NORTH) TO GET MESSAGE OUT TO THE FAITHFUL. THAT MESSAGE WILL BE TWOFOLD: NOT TO VOTE FOR PARTIES THAT ARE ANTI-CHRISTIAN (FAR LEFT, COMMUNISTS, AND FELLOW-TRAVELING MDP/CDE, FSP, AND MES), AND NOT TO EVADE ISSUE BY NOT VOTING. CONTROVERSY THAT BISHOPS' STAND IS SURE TO EVOKE WILL BE AUGMENTED BY FACT THAT THEIR COUNSEL CONFIDENTIAL

AGAINST CASTING BLANK BALLOTS RUNS CONTRARY TO THAT PUT FORWARD RECENTLY BY ARMED FORCES MOVEMENT SPOKESMAN (REF B), WHICH OPORTO SOCIALIST UNIT HAS LUKEWARMLY ENDORSED AS "LAST RESORT" ALTERNATIVE TO ABSTENTION AND PPD HAS CONDEMNED AS "ABDICATION."

6. FROM POINT OF VIEW OF ASSURING GOOD SHOWING BY DEMOCRATIC FORCES, BISHOPS' STAND COULD NOT BE MORE TIMELY. "PERSONAL" COMMUNICATION OF STAND BY LOCAL PARISH PRIESTS IS CERTAIN TO

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